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Jesus Christ - Life

THE CHILDHOOD OF
JESUS CHRIST

THE ANNUNCIATION

ROSSETTI

CONTROL MACHINE



THE CHILDHOOD OF JESUS CHRIST

BY

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Ruling Passion," "Little
Rivers," etc.*

WITH TWENTY ILLUSTRATIONS FROM
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THE CHILDHOOD OF
JESUS CHRIST

THE ANNUNCIATION OF THE
BIRTH OF JESUS

BURNE-JONES



THE CHILDHOOD OF JESUS CHRIST

THE story of the birth and childhood of Jesus Christ, which is narrated so briefly and simply, and yet with such wonderful, vivid beauty, in the New Testament, has taken deep hold upon the heart and the imagination of Christendom. No other part of the Gospel history has given so many themes to poet and painter. No other story in the world has been so often illustrated by so many famous artists. It is easy to see at least three of

The Childhood of Jesus Christ

the elements of interest which have made it a favourite subject in the arts.

First, there is the religious interest which centres in the arrival of the Divine Saviour in the world which He came to save. Such an event, for all who believe in the Christian religion, must have a profound significance. It is the sunrise of faith, the beginning of a new spiritual life, the laying of the corner-stone of the kingdom of heaven on earth. Even if the artist himself were not sure of this, did not altogether believe it, he must know that other people believed it; and putting himself into

THE ANNUNCIATION

VAN DER WEYDEN



The Childhood of Jesus Christ

sympathy with them through the imagination, he could see what the Nativity would mean to them, what a supreme importance was given by the faith of Christendom to the brief and simple story of the birth at Bethlehem.

Second, there is the human interest which clings to the ever-beautiful relation of motherhood and childhood. The tenderest and most unselfish love is that with which a true mother looks upon her little child. The most perfect innocence and trustful joy are revealed in the deep eyes of the baby who smiles into the face of his mother bending above him.

The Childhood of Jesus Christ

The paintings of the Child Jesus and the Virgin Mary have drawn into themselves the best thoughts of men concerning the gracious secret of maternity and the unstained bliss of infancy.

Third, there is the poetic and pictorial interest which grows out of the incidents of the story: the strange contrast between the heavenly significance of the birth of Christ and its outward circumstances: the blending of light and shade, joy and sorrow, hope and fear, angelic songs and earthly persecutions. All these contrasting elements, grouping themselves about the central figure of a help-

THE ANNUNCIATION

FRANCIA



The Childhood of Jesus Christ

less little child with a mission of celestial importance to fulfil, afford a field of illumination and illustration such as art loves.

For in the great ages and schools of painting the curious theory that a picture must not have a meaning, but must be essentially nothing more than a striking or pleasing arrangement of lines and combination of colours, has never prevailed. Truth of drawing, symmetry of composition, beauty and harmony of colouring, — these are essential, of course, to a good painting. But they are only the means by which the painter expresses himself, his thought, his feeling, without words,

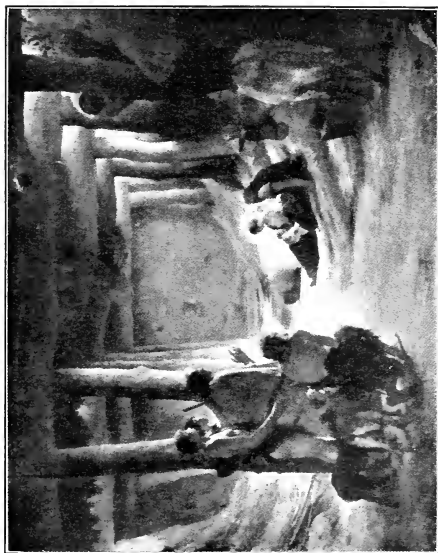
The Childhood of Jesus Christ

to the eyes of other men. Great artists have always chosen subjects for their pictures, and for the most part subjects with associations of poetic or dramatic meaning — subjects which appeal directly to a quickened emotion in those who look thoughtfully and understandingly at the pictures. It would be difficult to say where one could find more of such subjects, (so full of vivid contrasts, so immediate in their appeal to many hearts,) than in the story of the Child Jesus.

My first advice then, to those who wish thoroughly to appreciate and enjoy the pictures reproduced in this book is to read and re-read

THE ARRIVAL OF THE
SHEPHERDS

LEROLLE



The Childhood of Jesus Christ

the Gospel of St. Matthew from the eighteenth verse of the first chapter to the end of the second chapter, and the first two chapters of St. Luke's Gospel. It is not possible for any one really to study and rightly to value the works of art which represent the different incidents of the birth and childhood of Christ, without knowing, and knowing intimately, the story which they illustrate.

Then it would be wise to read some of the later legends which were woven, in the apocryphal books and in the mediæval poems and narratives, about the central events of the story given in the Gospels.

The Childhood of Jesus Christ

Many of these legends are curious and fantastic, evidently allegorical and symbolical. They have none of the simple directness and quiet restraint of the Biblical history. They are, in effect, clear illustrations of that native trait of the human mind, — familiar to every one who has tried to tell a true story to a child, — the craving for picturesque detail. “How did it happen? Where did it happen? Who else was there? How did they look? What did they do afterwards?” Such are the questions that children always ask when they hear a story. And these are the questions to which men have

THE HOLY NIGHT

CORREGGIO



The Childhood of Jesus Christ

worked out elaborate answers, full of fanciful incident and imagery, in the apocryphal and mediæval legends, such as the *Protevangelium of St. James*, *The Gospel of St. Thomas*, *The Gospel of the pseudo-Matthew*, *The History of the Nativity of Mary*, *The Golden Legend* of Jacobus de Voragine, the poems of Konrad of Fussesbrunn, Walther of Rheinau, the Abbess Hroswitha, the "White Rose" of the cloister of Gandersheim, and the traditions which were preserved in fragmentary form by Justin Martyr, St. Jerome, St. Bernard, and many other writers.

Much of this legendary and sym-

The Childhood of Jesus Christ

bolical material was taken up quite naïvely by the painters and embodied in their pictures. Suppose that a painter is making a picture of the Annunciation. He chooses to represent Mary as passing through a garden when the angel comes to her. But this is not a mere fancy, wrought out by the painter's imagination. It is one of the details of the story which he has found in the apocryphal Gospel of St. James. Mary, says this ancient legend, was chosen by lot from among the virgins of Nazareth to spin the royal purple for the Temple-veil. One day, as she was returning from the fountain, with her pitcher of water,

THE ADORATION OF THE
SHEPHERDS

MURILLO



The Childhood of Jesus Christ

the angel met her and said, "Hail, thou who art full of grace!" and when she went back to her spinning, he came again to her to complete his message. If the picture represents Mary in the house, working at the veil, the artist has chosen to show us the second appearance of the angel. If she is depicted with a book before her, it is because St. Bernard tells us the legend that she was reading in the prophecies of Isaiah, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son," when the angel came and said, "Blessed art *thou* among women."

The emblems chosen by the artists to put into their pictures

The Childhood of Jesus Christ

are all significant. The pot of lilies at Mary's side, the lily-branch in the angel's hand symbolize purity. The olive-bough means peace. The dove, descending on outspread wings, signifies the Holy Spirit. Everything has a hidden meaning, a message for the heart. And all this is not mere ornament, the play of idle fancy. It is the sign-language by which human souls speak to one another in poetry too deep for words.

Or, suppose that a painter has given us a picture of the Nativity which shows the Child and his mother and Joseph in a cave. This is according to the account of Jus-

THE PRESENTATION IN THE
TEMPLE

DE CHAMPAIGNE



The Childhood of Jesus Christ

tin Martyr, (and quite in harmony with the customs of Palestine,) that the stable of the inn where Christ was born was a grotto in the rocks. In another picture, perhaps, you see the ox and the ass bowing their heads before the Child. This is a detail given in the *Gospel of the pseudo-Matthew* as a fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah, "The ox knoweth his owner and the ass his master's crib." In other pictures the most striking thing is a dazzling, supernatural light radiating from the Child and filling the stable, so that the shepherds who have just entered must shade their eyes. This is a vivid

The Childhood of Jesus Christ

feature of the description in many of the legends of the Nativity.

Or look at some of the paintings of the Visit of the Magi. The Wise Men are almost always three in number ; they are dressed as kings ; one of them is old, one middle-aged, and one young ; often a black man is represented among them. Here we see how the story has been developed from its simple form, in the second chapter of St. Matthew, (where nothing is said about the number of the Magi, or their ages, or their royal rank,) into the full, rich, symbolical narrative of *The Golden Legend*, which tells us that they were three kings, named Cas-

THE MADONNA WITH THE
INFANT JESUS

DAGNAN-BOUVERET



The Childhood of Jesus Christ

par, Melchior, and Balthasar, and that one of them came from Africa.

It is easy, then, for one who studies the works of art with an intelligent interest, to see how all this various embroidery of legends was worked into the presentation of the story of the Child Jesus. The painter, even more than the children's story-teller, must give details. He must show the place, the scene, the persons present, and how they looked. It was natural that he should turn, for many of these particulars, to the familiar legends which enlarged upon the Gospel narrative. It is true that the historical value of these em-

The Childhood of Jesus Christ

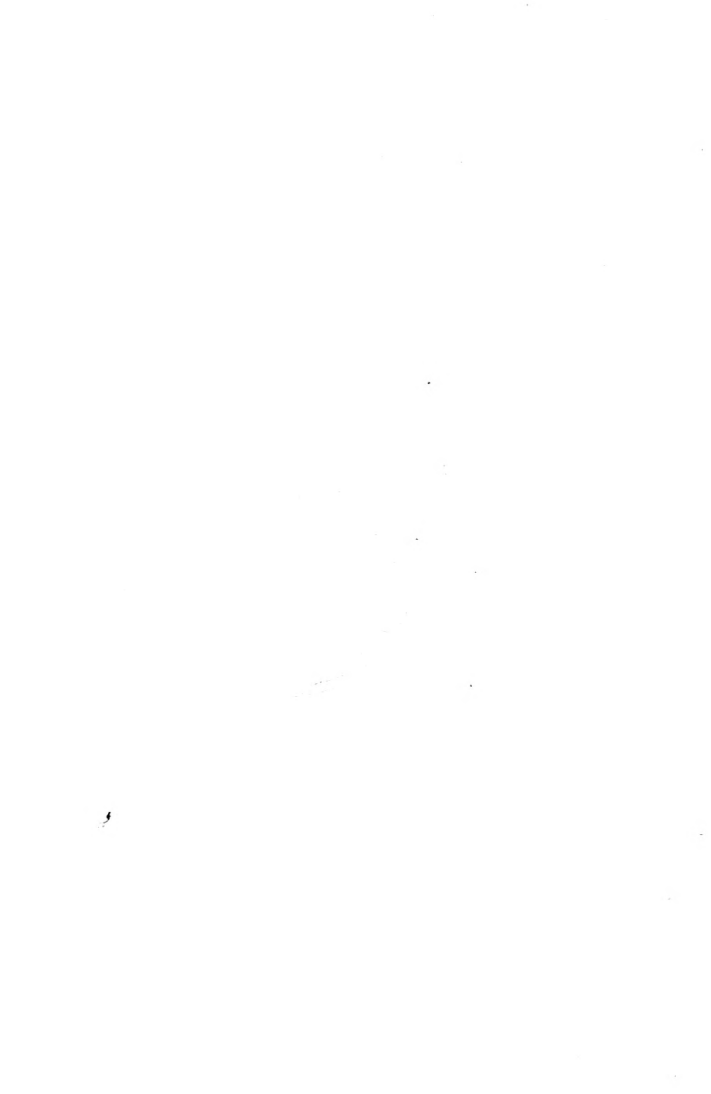
broideries is of the slightest ; but their pictorial value is rich ; and their symbolism is sometimes profound and vital.

The five chief points around which the paintings of the birth and childhood of Christ naturally group themselves are (1) The Annunciation, (2) The Nativity, (3) The Adoration of the Magi, (4) The Flight into Egypt, (5) The Home at Nazareth. At each of these points a certain element of interest, human and spiritual, becomes dominant ; a certain aspect of the story is perceived with singular clearness, and felt with controlling power. This dominant note

THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM

BURNE-JONES





The Childhood of Jesus Christ

is what the artist must touch, if his picture is to have an inward harmony with the subject, and a real charm for the heart as well as for the eyes of men. Let us ask, then, what are those five *motifs*, and how have the painters dealt with them?

1. The Annunciation comes from the first chapter of St. Luke, and with it are associated two minor incidents, the visit of Mary to her cousin Elizabeth, and the birth of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ. The painters have delighted to show us the virginal beauty and meekness of Mary, the joy with which the angel brought his message of gladness, the awe

The Childhood of Jesus Christ

and wonder with which she received the new conception of her son as the Son of the Highest, the Saviour of His people. No picture of the Annunciation is good in which this wonder and this joy are not expressed. If in addition the painter has chosen to put in many details from his own fancy to make us feel the innocence and lowly grace of Mary's life ; if he has shown us the quiet work with which she is busy, the sweet order of her room which images the tranquillity of her soul ; this also is well. But the great thing is that he should perceive and show, as simply as possible, the charm of that perfect figure of

THE ADORATION OF THE
WISE MEN

VELASQUEZ



The Childhood of Jesus Christ

maidenhood, no rude peasant-girl,
but one with royal blood in her
veins and heavenly thoughts in her
heart,

“Faithful and hopeful, wise in charity,
Strong in grave peace, in pity circum-
spect,”

worthy to be favoured among wo-
men as the Mother of Jesus, and
to have watch and ward over the
helpless infancy and growing boy-
hood of the Redeemer of men.

2. The pictures of the Nativity
have a greater variety of incidents
and of modes of presentation. The
simplest are those which show Mary
and Joseph in the stable with the

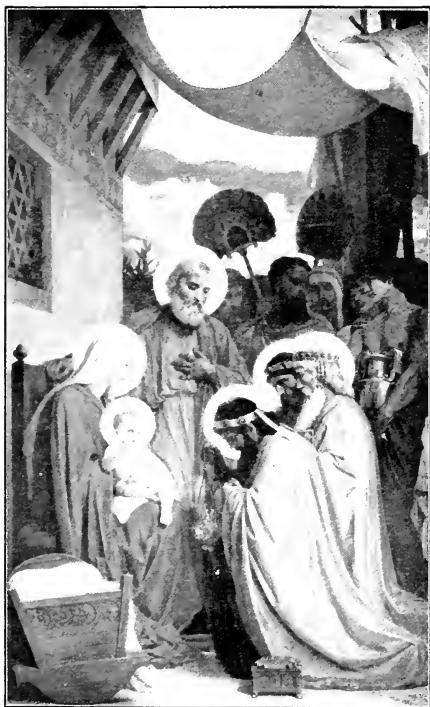
The Childhood of Jesus Christ

child; then come those in which the angels appear, or the shepherds come to pay their adoration; another conception represents the Mother alone with her Babe, adoring Him, or nursing Him. Pictures of the Presentation in the Temple, and perhaps some of the Madonna and Child, belong to the general theme of the Nativity because their central idea is the advent of Christ as a little babe.

Here the painters have found a wide field for imagination, and have used large liberty in expressing the feelings with which different persons drew near to the Holy Child. Mary is almost always shown as

THE ADORATION OF THE
WISE MEN

BOUGUEREAU



The Childhood of Jesus Christ

wondrously happy ; sometimes, as in Murillo's " Adoration of the Shepherds," lifting the cloth that covers the Child and displaying Him with gentle pride ; sometimes, as in Correggio's lovely little picture at Dresden, bending over Him in a sweet rapture of tenderness which makes her very hands tremble with joy. Joseph is too often depicted as a feeble and somnolent old man, apparently little interested in the scene. There is no warrant for this in the Gospel narrative. I think it far more truthful to show him as the quiet, strong man, the natural protector and guardian of the Mother and the Child. The

The Childhood of Jesus Christ

shepherds are sometimes very still and reverent, as in Murillo's picture, and sometimes very excited, as in Correggio's "La Notte." Either way may be true; but the one thing that the painter should not do is to make them noblemen in disguise, as some of the Florentine painters did.

All worthy representations of the Nativity in Art, however they may differ in minor details, whether the painter has tried to reproduce the actual scene with faithful realism of costume and surroundings, or has given free rein to his fancy and transferred the event to a setting frankly drawn from his own age

ADORATION OF MAGI

RUBENS



The Childhood of Jesus Christ

and land, should have, I think, this one quality in common: they should make the interest of every figure in the picture centre in the Child; and most of all, the Mother's interest. They should lift up and glorify maternity and infancy by bringing before us in visible form the conception that the birth of Jesus, to those who realized, however dimly, what it meant, was the dawn of a new day of hope for the sinful and suffering world. To do less than this would be to fall short of the first requirement of the realism of the spirit.

3. With the Adoration of the Magi, a new element comes into

The Childhood of Jesus Christ

the scene. These wise men from the East, whether they were kings or not, were the representatives of the outside world. They brought with them precious gifts from afar. Their homage typified and foreshadowed the worship which was to be given to Christ, in coming centuries, by the rulers and teachers of the Gentiles.

There are pictures which show the Magi on their journey led by the star, sometimes shining in the form of a babe in the sky ; and others which show them at the court of Herod, asking their way ; and others which show them being warned by an angel in a dream

THE HOLY FAMILY

MURILLO



The Childhood of Jesus Christ

not to go back to Jerusalem ; and others which show them returning by sea to their own country. But the great majority of painters have chosen the moment at which the gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh were presented to the Child. Here there is room for splendid colour and dramatic contrast. Gentile da Fabriano studded his picture with solid gold and gems to make it magnificent. Rubens made his canvas glow with rich pigments and filled it with sweeping draperies and majestic forms. Bouguereau has grouped his kings in reverent majesty beside the cradle and given each of them a golden halo.

The Childhood of Jesus Christ

But how did the Child receive the gifts? Was He sleeping quietly? Did He reach out in childish glee to grasp the glittering tribute and play with it? Did He lift His hand in blessing, with a Divine intimation of the meaning of the strange scene? Who knows! The evangelist tells us nothing of this; and so the artist is free to give us his own interpretation of the prophetic scene in which dignity bowed down before meekness, and experience revered innocence, and the power and learning of the world paid homage to the Heavenly promise of a little child.

4. The Flight into Egypt is

THE VIRGIN WITH THE
CHILD JESUS

BOTTICELLI



The Childhood of Jesus Christ

the contrasting companion-piece to the Adoration of the Magi. The one brings the great world into the dwelling of the Child Jesus ; the other carries the Child Jesus out into the great world.

The pictures of this subject fall into two main divisions: those which represent the Holy Family on their journey, and those which show them resting, either by the way, or in the land of Egypt. The paintings which deal with the latter theme — commonly known as “ The Repose ” — include some of the most beautiful works of art, especially during the last three centuries. Many details have been

The Childhood of Jesus Christ

introduced from the legends of the flight, in which the apocryphal *History of the Nativity of Mary* is particularly rich. This is one of them : The Holy Family rested by the road beneath a date-palm, and Mary desired to eat of the fruit ; but it hung high above her head. Joseph, being weary, was not able to climb the tree. But the Child Jesus knew His mother's wish, and at His command the tree bent down its branches. Then He thrust His finger into the sand, and a spring of water gushed forth. The next morning Jesus thanked the obedient tree, and promised that one of its branches should be

MADONNA DEL CARDELLINO

RAPHAEL



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The Childhood of Jesus Christ

carried by the angels and planted in His Father's Paradise. Here is the origin of all those paintings of the Repose which show the Mother and Child beneath a bending palm-tree. Another idea has been introduced by modern painters who show Mary and the Child resting in Egypt, while above them is seen an image of the goddess "Isis, the good mother, the faithful nurse, suckling her infant son Horus."

With many pictures of the Flight an allusion to the Massacre of the Innocents is naturally joined. Sometimes it is made a companion-picture. Sometimes it appears as

The Childhood of Jesus Christ

a distant scene in the background. But the most beautiful and significant connection between these two incidents has been imagined by Mr. Holman Hunt in his great painting of "The Triumph of the Innocents."

The scene is in the south country of Judea, and the time is after midnight ; but the full moon pours a pallid radiance over the plain and the distant hills where the watch-fires are glowing red. In front marches Joseph, with his basket of tools on his back, a sturdy son of toil, anxious and watchful for his charge. The mother, a noble woman of Palestine, carries the Child

THE TRIUMPH OF THE
INNOCENTS

HOLMAN HUNT



The Childhood of Jesus Christ

in her arms, happy and fearless. But who are these little children that run and float beside the travelers? They are the spirits of the murdered innocents of Bethlehem, set free to follow the infant Saviour, and knowing that through Him they have entered into eternal joy. They are the first of the great company of martyrs, who have triumphed over death by dying for Christ's sake. Three tiny ghosts in the rear have not yet felt His presence nor caught sight of Him. They are passing through the shadow of pain and mortal anguish. The light has not yet awakened them. But the others are radiant and

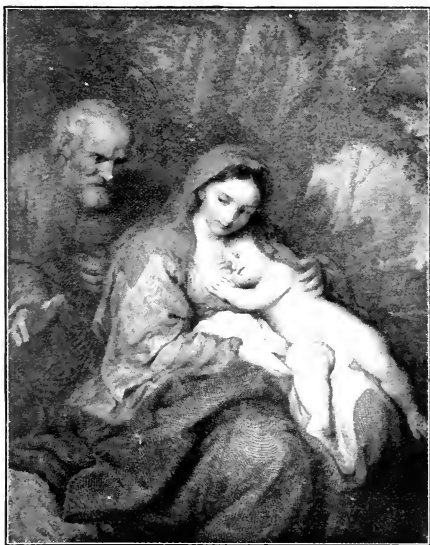
The Childhood of Jesus Christ

rejoicing as ransomed souls. The stream on which they float is a symbol of the mystical river of life, clear as crystal ; and the bubbles that break from it reflect the shining gates and towers of Heaven. Joseph does not see the spirits. I doubt whether even Mary sees them clearly. But Jesus recognizes His former playmates with joy. He leans from His mother's arm to greet them, holding out a handful of wheat, the symbol of the bread of Heaven.

Is it all fanciful, meaningless, unreal ? Or is it a true picture to the eye of what faith beholds in the religion of Jesus ? Surely

THE HOLY FAMILY RESTING
ON THE WAY TO EGYPT

VAN DYCK



The Childhood of Jesus Christ

the very deepest meaning of His birth and childhood is the bringing of light and blessing to the suffering little ones of earth ; a deeper compassion and a tenderer care for them ; and the promise of a heaven full of happy children.

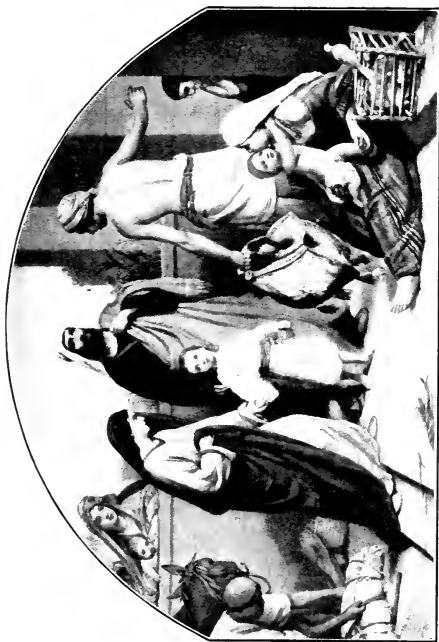
5. After the return from Egypt comes the home life at Nazareth, the household joy of the Holy Family, the education of the boy Jesus, the friendship with His little cousin John, the pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and the finding of the young Christ in the Temple among the doctors, hearing them and asking them questions. There were intimations and foreshadowings, no

The Childhood of Jesus Christ

doubt, of the strange and high and sacrificial mission that lay before the boy Jesus: there were talks with His mother, who had kept in mind the mysterious events of His birth and infancy and pondered them in her heart. But there were also hours of quiet study over the Book, and of lonely, happy wandering among the hills, and of joyous pastime with His playfellow, and of patient labour in the carpenter-shop of Joseph. Does not the Gospel tell us that "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man?" And without study and work and play, without companionship and

THE RETURN OF THE HOLY
FAMILY TO NAZARETH

DOBSON



The Childhood of Jesus Christ

solitude, without watchful care and wise freedom, such gracious growth from childhood to manhood is impossible.

The artists have given us their visions of the way in which these elements may have entered into the life of Jesus. I do not care to ask for a historical proof of every incident that they have chosen to depict. I am glad that they have not often turned for aid, in representing these early years of Christ, to the apocryphal books, which give incidents that are frequently trivial and sometimes unworthy. The painters have been wise in taking little from this source. It is

The Childhood of Jesus Christ

enough if they have done their work reverently, carefully, with thoughtful imagination, and with the painter's skill which lends a speaking beauty to the picture. It is enough if they help us to feel the divine charm of the boyhood of Jesus and realize the certainty of the eternal wisdom that entrusted the Saviour of the world to the care of such a mother as Mary and such a guardian and protector as Joseph. It is enough if they make us remember more clearly that the Lord and Master of us all grew up in a simple, human home ruled by

“Pure religion, breathing household laws.”

THE FINDING OF THE SAVIOUR
IN THE TEMPLE

HOLMAN HUNT





